

Addressing the Unique Challenges of Long-Term English Language Learners at East Central
High School

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Author Note

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Abstract

Research on Secondary English Language Learners (ELLs), particularly Long-Term English Language Learners (LTELLs), highlights significant barriers these students face in achieving language proficiency. A 2015 study by the California Department of Education revealed that only 20% of LTELLs passed the ACCESS test in reading and writing. These students are often placed in lower-level academic tracks and have lower high school graduation rates than their English-speaking peers. In 2017, a University of Texas at Austin study found that LTELLs who received intensive English instruction were more likely to pass the ACCESS test, particularly when placed in mainstream classrooms with English-speaking peers. Key factors influencing LTELL success include the quality of instruction, classroom placement, and individual characteristics. Additionally, academic achievement, motivation, and social-emotional well-being contribute to overall success. Although LTELLs face many challenges, they can thrive academically and beyond with the right support.

Keywords: LTELL, ACCESS test, language acquisition, classroom placement, targeted interventions

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LTEL Intervention at East Central High School: An At-Risk Population

East Central High School serves a diverse student population of 1,120 students, where 46% identify as Hispanic, 24% as African American, and 23% as Caucasian. Over the years, the school's English Language Development (ELD) program has expanded significantly, with a steady increase in newcomers—from twenty-five students annually in 2015 to 130 in 2023. Currently, the school enrolls ninety-eight newcomers, alongside 360 Long-Term Multilingual Learners (LTELs), who have been in the ELD program for more than four years (see Figure 2).

The 2023 ACCESS test results reveal a concerning trend: numerous LTELs have yet to make meaningful progress, despite efforts. Of the 687 students assessed, only 314 showed improvements in speaking, 251 in listening, 258 in reading, and 254 in writing (see Table 1). To address this, a collaborative intervention plan is necessary. The author, alongside Assistant Principal Valarie Farrow, Principal Rochelle Wilson, and retired Assistant Principal Brian Stone, involved reviewing the data from Ellevation, the WIDA ACCESS test reports, and student schedules. Through this, they identified which students require targeted support to exit the ELD program within the next year or two.

The data collected for this intervention plan were comprehensive, including interviews, data walks, and dashboard and school report card discussions. The author, along with Valarie Farrow, Assistant Principal, Rochelle Wilson, Principal of East Central High School, and Brian Stone, retired Assistant Principal from East Central High School, reviewed the data from Ellevation and the WIDA ACCESS test score reports along with the students' schedules. This thorough review allowed us to identify which students would need more intervention to exit the program next year or the following year. Over four weeks, we meticulously examined the data, and the score reports to build schedules for the students who are close to exiting the program,

along with communicating with the parents and students about planned goals for the next school year so their students can pass the ACCESS test in Spring 2024 (Shockley, 2018). In planning meetings, we identified forty-eight students who scored an overall average of 4.7, missing the score of 4.8 due to either their writing or speaking scores. Those students split between two teachers, doing weekly practice on ACCESS practice tests to meet the requirements to exit the program. The students who score between 4.0 and 4.6 also need intervention to ensure they exit the program (Figure 3). These students are placed in a class with an ELD teacher who can coach them to achieve the score needed for exiting with systematic practice and reinforcement. The school leader's responsibility is to plan for targeted intervention to an at-risk population, as there are always areas for improvement.

Introduction of East Central High School

East Central High School is located within the Tulsa Public Schools district in Tulsa, Oklahoma. Located along Route 66, the school sits in a multicultural mecca, boasting over twenty diverse cultures and a few languages, and has become known as the Exchange District due to the community's diversity. The largest demographic group at the school is Hispanic/Latino students, often comprising around 50-60% of the student body, many of whom come from Spanish-speaking households. African American students are the second-largest group, followed by White and Native American students, reflecting the area's Indigenous history. The school also has a notable number of English Language Learners, including students who speak languages like Burmese and Zomi due to recent immigrant and refugee populations (Figure 4). Economically, over 80% of the students qualify for free or reduced lunch, indicating a high economic disadvantage. The neighborhood around East Central High School is similarly diverse, with a significant Latino population and growing communities of refugees from

countries like Myanmar, Vietnam, Afghanistan, and Syria. Many residents work in manufacturing, construction, and service sectors, and the area experiences higher poverty rates than the city average. Despite economic challenges, the community is known for its strong family values and active involvement in school events, contributing to the rich cultural tapestry of East Tulsa.

Vision and Goals

As an educator and principal in a multilingual and multicultural high school, the vision is to create a culturally responsive, inclusive, and academically rigorous learning environment that supports the success of all students, including English Language Learners (ELLs) and native English speakers (NES). The author will use the Tulsa Public Schools English Language Success Plan, the English Language Development Standards Framework for Grades 9-12, and the WIDA English Language Development Standards Framework 2020 Edition components to achieve this vision (NELP 1.1).

The Tulsa Public Schools English Language Success plan contains six key elements that help form the basis of this plan. The key elements are Language Development and Academic Success, Professional Development, Equity and Inclusivity, Family and Community Engagement, Data-Driven Decision Making, and Accountability and Monitoring. The Language Development and Academic Success focuses on the use of the WIDA English Language Development Standards to guide instruction to ensure that ELLs are progressing linguistically and academically in line with their non-ELL peers. Professional Development trains teachers in culturally responsive pedagogy, effective strategies for teaching multilingual learners, and data to inform instruction. Equity and Inclusivity plan creates equitable learning opportunities and environments for all learners, with a focus on ELLs accessing the same rigorous content and

academic opportunities as their peers, removing barriers from learning and social life. The plan on Family and Community Engagement recognizes that the best predictor of academic success is the involvement of the family and the community in the academics of the student. Data-Driven Decision Making focuses on how schools should use data from assessments such as the WIDA ACCESS test to monitor language proficiency and academic growth of ELLs. Finally, Accountability and Monitoring helps schools develop clear goals for student performance and includes mechanisms for monitoring progress at the school level and classroom level, and district wide as a whole. The plan ensures that TPS and the site adhere to federal and state guidelines for ELL education (TPS 2018).

The WIDA Standards Framework provides a common language and expectations for language development across different proficiency levels and language domains, which can help ensure consistency and equity in language instruction (WIDA 2020) (NELP 1.2, NELP2.3). By aligning instruction with the language development goals outlined in the Standards, teachers can ensure that ELLs and NES are receiving consistent and appropriate language instruction. I will use the Standards to guide curriculum development, instructional planning, assessment, and monitoring of student progress. In the classroom, teachers post the learning and language objectives, clarifying how language is utilized during instructional time, and create opportunities for students to utilize comprehensible input during individual and group learning time (Ellevation 2023).

In addition, the author advocates the use of Performance Definitions and Can-Do Descriptors to support the assessment and monitoring of student progress. These components provide detailed descriptions of the language knowledge and skills that students should be able to demonstrate at different proficiency levels. Using these tools, teachers can identify areas where

additional support is needed and tailor instruction to meet each student's language development goals (TPS 2018). We will provide ongoing professional development to teachers, focusing on WIDA Standards and how to interpret ACCESS score reports. (NELP 7.4)

Finally, Model Performance Indicators to support professional learning and development for teachers. The MPIs provide specific examples of the language knowledge and skills that students should be able to demonstrate (TPS 2018). The indicators not only guide teachers in comprehending language development goals and expectations of language learning, but also offer an ethical framework for instruction, ensuring that teaching practices are inclusive, equitable, and aligned with the legal standards such Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) (NELP 2.1). Utilizing these examples from the MPIs, teachers can design instruction appropriate for their student's language development needs, have access to a fair and rigorous education, and evaluate instructional materials to ensure they align with the Standards demonstrate ethical decision-making, as teachers must critically assess the resources for cultural bias, fairness, and accuracy (WIDA 2020).

In addition to adhering to the ethical and legal requirements, school leaders must advocate for these principles in their schools. This includes communicating the importance of student attendance, providing equitable learning opportunities for all students, and modelling ethical behavior inside and outside of the classroom through transparency, fairness, and accountability in instruction and instructional planning and practices. By cultivating an environment of trust and integrity, teachers can lead by example and encourage ethical conduct in their students and newer colleagues. Modelling this behavior extends beyond the classroom, it includes fostering open, respectful communication with students, families, and community members about the goals and progress of students (Snyder 2021).

In summary, by using both the Tulsa Public Schools English Language Success Plan and the WIDA English Language Development Standards Framework 2020 Edition, educators in multilingual and multicultural high schools can provide targeted and effective language instruction that promotes academic success for all students. By creating a learning environment that supports all students' academic success and personal growth, we can prepare them for college and career readiness in an increasingly diverse and global world (Ford 2022).

Problem: Stalled Language Acquisition

Despite being in the ELD program for several years, many LTELs at East Central High School are not making the progress necessary to exit the program. Breaking down the scores, students after year six in the program show a decline in writing and speaking performance. This suggests that instructional support is misaligned with student needs, highlighting the necessity for more personalized and systematic interventions. (NELP 2.2, NELP 2.3) The ACCESS test results from 2023 and 2024 show stagnation in key language domains of Writing and Speaking, suggesting a need for more personalized and systematic intervention. Specifically, forty-eight students scored an overall average of 4.7 on the ACCESS test, just shy of the 4.8 required to exit the program (Shockley, 2018). These students, along with eighty-three who scored between 4.0 and 4.6, require additional, focused intervention in writing and speaking to help them meet proficiency standards. The students, having been in the program since early elementary school, feel trapped with the designation of being an ELL student. Breaking down the scores, students after year six in the program, start dropping in their writing and speaking scores, and even the listening and reading scores by rushing through the exam to finish as quickly as possible (Figure 4) with the average time taken by LTELs on the Listening and Reading portion taking no longer than 15 minutes, given that each section takes roughly 45-60 minutes to complete. As Shin

points out in their article, “Stuck in the Middle; Examination of Long-Term English Learners,” they face misaligned instructional supports as many of the supports are geared toward newcomers and those of limited English proficiency. They also face the negative impact of the repeated WIDA assessments, which reinforces the feelings of frustration, embarrassment, and demotivation (Shin 2020). Using the student data from Ellevation, many of the students were born in the United States and grew up in multilingual households, thereby, providing clues on their English proficiency or lack thereof.

The Solution: Tailored Interventions.

East Central High School has 360 Long Term Multilingual Learners, according to the school dashboard in PowerSchool and Ellevation, out of 537 Multilingual Learners at the site. The vision for the area of need will create a direct intervention pathway to successfully exit the ELD program and make Adequate Yearly Progress on the test (NELP 4.1). The direct intervention will depend on the ACCESS test scores and the length of time that the student has been in the ELD program. In planning meetings, the school identified forty-eight students who scored an overall average of 4.7, missing the score of 4.8 due to either their writing or speaking scores. Those students split between two teachers, do weekly practice on writing components tied to the WIDA Language standards and practice speaking on topics to meet the requirements of the Speaking domain aligned to the WIDA Language standards, to exit the program. The students who scored between 4.0 and 4.7 are placed in courses where targeted support is provided, focusing on writing and speaking skills, based on the WIDA language standards. (NELP 4.1) By focusing on the two domains where students need the most improvement, we align with the instructional priorities set out in the WIDA standards, supported by data from ACCESS tests. (NELP 4.2) There were eighty-three students in that bracket that had plummeting

growth targets. The students are placed in a class called ELD-Bridging. With an ELD teacher who can coach them to achieve the score needed for exiting with systematic practice and reinforcement to either exit the program or make adequate yearly progress (Martinez, 2019). By focusing on the two domains where students are either lacking confidence or not attempting to do well on, the intervention would see students make AYP or exit all together (NELP 4.2). Students that scored between a 4.0 and 4.6 are placed in an ELD-Expanding course.

The proposed interventions will have minimal impact on district resources since the district already prioritizes having more students exit the ELD program within five years. At the school level, the impact will be noticeable in class sizes for both general education and ELD teachers (TPS 2023).

The school leadership team, including Ms. Farrow and Ms. Wilson, believes that reducing class sizes and increasing teacher support will ensure more students receive the targeted attention they need to succeed. For English Language Development teachers, each would have two ELD- Expanding classes to reduce the numbers from 40 to 25 to 30 students. Predicated on hiring two additional ELD teachers and in discussions with Ms. Wilson and Ms. Farrow, they believe that by increasing the department, more students are served rather than just those enrolled in an ELD class (Wilson, 2023). Currently, the school has allocations for 7.5 ELD teachers. However, the site has two additional allocations for general education or Title III. By utilizing those additional allocations, the department could reduce class sizes for most ELD (English Language Development) classes (NELP 5.2). The classes have a class size capacity of fifteen for ELD-Introduction and Entering, twenty for ELD-Emerging and ELD-Developing, and twenty-five for ELD-Expanding, and Bridging has a capacity of twenty students (Farrow, 2023).

This data is in the School Leader Planning Workbook, which the district provides site leaders access to (Wilson 2024).

The impact on students and families would vary as the effects would depend on the student's ACCESS test scores and for how long they have been in the program. The students who are close to exiting by scoring between 4.5 and 4.7 will be required to take an ELD course, which may impact their class schedule, except if the student is a senior and needs all available classes to graduate. Retired Assistant Principal Brian Stone and Assistant Principal Valerie Farrow, who craft the students' schedules with the counselors, advised that the parents and students receive communication before scheduled pick-up, so any questions are answered beforehand (Stone, 2023).

The anticipated outcomes of the proposed plan are viewed in the subsequent ACCESS testing windows over the next two years. Students making AYP on the ACCESS test are currently at 10%, below the state average of 32% (OK SDE, 2023). Therefore, the goal for AYP should be to meet the state average by year two. The other goal is the percentage of students exiting the program, which currently sits at 20% for the site and 34% for the state. The goal is to improve by 5% year to year when the school reaches or exceeds the state average. Meeting the state averages for AYP and Exiting would increase the school's Report Card and metrics (Farrow 2023)

Providing communication about the improvement plan.

In communicating an improvement plan, school leaders must engage stakeholders across all levels, including faculty, staff, community members, businesses, and students, to ensure a shared vision. Ms. Farrow emphasizes the importance of incorporating diverse voices through structured protocols that facilitate meaningful input. A key part of this process is ensuring a

common language and consistent talking points, which help articulate the vision widely. Transparency in data is crucial; leaders need to explain data from sources like report cards, PowerSchool, and the Ellevation Dashboard to give stakeholders context (NELP 1.2). Dr. Keith Ballard, who led Project Schoolhouse, highlights the importance of data-driven decision-making while recognizing the emotional stakes involved. He proposed ten measurement criteria to objectively evaluate school performance, which were publicized to ensure transparency and factual reporting. To guide the intervention, the plan involves four committee meetings—two before the school year starts and two before December—to allow for comprehensive data analysis and focused decision-making on areas needing the most support (NELP 5.1).

The resources required to increase AYP and meet the Exit Criteria for English Language Learners (ELLs) include adding two additional ELD teachers and a counselor who specializes in the scheduling needs of ELD students. These staff members will receive training on ACCESS testing and interpreting score reports and will be allocated dedicated time to meeting with families. Budget adjustments provide for these new hires, with Title III funds earmarked for the additional teachers and Title I funds for the counselor, while coverage for parent and community meetings will come from substitute pay budgets (NELP 5.2). These structural changes are crucial for addressing the ongoing teacher shortage, particularly in Oklahoma’s ESL/ELD landscape. Additionally, Tulsa Public Schools’ new 5% pay increase and other incentives aim to attract qualified ELD teachers. Looking ahead, there is also consideration for adding an ELD dean or assistant principal, paralleling the school’s current support for special education students, to strengthen leadership in this area.

The plan is equitable, inclusive, and culturally responsive, designed to ensure that all students, regardless of language proficiency or time in the program, can succeed. It provides

tailored support, such as weekly WIDA standards practice for students on the verge of exiting the program (Martinez 2019). Involving a broad range of stakeholders ensures that the plan is responsive to the needs of the entire school community. Additionally, the inclusion of a counselor dedicated to ELD students reflects an awareness of both cultural and scheduling needs, reinforcing the plan's equity and responsiveness (NELP 2.2). The detailed budget and resource allocation, along with thoughtful engagement of various groups, make this plan realistic and achievable (Farrow 2023).

To effectively communicate this plan, Mrs. Wilson and Ms. Farrow propose using multiple channels—social media, text messages, letters, and email—to ensure that all relevant parties including those not directly on the committee are informed. Initial communication will be sent out before the school year and again after it starts, with follow-up messaging before the December testing window to prepare families and students for ACCESS testing. School staff will receive updates through staff meetings, emails, or the school website, ensuring they are fully aware of the plan and their role in its implementation. Students receive information through classroom discussions, assemblies, and newsletters, while community members receive updates via community meetings, social media, and local newspapers. Families will also be involved through parent-teacher conferences, newsletters, and the school website, ensuring transparency and inviting input. Visual aids such as charts and graphs can be used to make the plan more accessible, with cultural sensitivity guiding all communications. The goal is to ensure that every stakeholder group has a clear understanding of the plan and feels included in the process. (Payne, 2021).

Evaluation

The plan's effectiveness will be evaluated in three ways. The ELD team will monitor the number of LTELs and their performance on the ACCESS test. The ELD and School Leader teams will assess the effectiveness of the targeted interventions through regular assessments, practice tests, and a comparison of subsequent ACCESS test scores. The school leader team will analyze class sizes and teacher allocations to determine if they align with the plan's goals. The school Leader team will evaluate the impact on general education teachers, ELD teachers, and class sizes against the expected outcomes. The school leaders' team and committee will gauge the feedback and responses regarding the new scheduling and interventions. The committee will assess the communication process's effectiveness in ensuring smooth implementation and addressing potential challenges (NELP 4.3). The school leader team and the committee monitor the percentage of students making AYP on the ACCESS test and the percentage of students exiting the program. School leaders will monitor the impact on students, families, and teachers to ensure continuous improvement and refinement of the plan. (NELP 4.4, NELP 6.1) In summary, evaluating the plan's effectiveness will involve ongoing analysis of student performance data, teacher allocations, class sizes, communication effectiveness, and progress toward the set goals (Clark-Gareca 2020).

Conclusion.

The proposed plan aims to address the needs of Long-Term Multilingual Learners (LTELs) at East Central High School by creating a targeted intervention pathway for their successful exit from the English Language Development (ELD) program and to achieve Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) on the ACCESS test. The plan involves identifying students who scored between 4.0 and 4.7 on the ACCESS test, offering direct interventions to meet exit

criteria, and adjusting class sizes and teacher allocations accordingly. It also emphasizes communication with students and families to ensure smooth implementation. The significance of the proposed plan is multifold. It focuses on improving language skills through tailored interventions, which ensures that LTELs receive the necessary support to excel in their language development. This personalized approach enhances students' language proficiency and overall academic performance. By aligning our interventions with both the Tulsa Public Schools English Language Success Plan and the WIDA Standards Framework, we aim to meet state and district benchmarks for student success, while adhering to best practices in ethical leadership and data-driven decision-making. (NELP 1.2, NELP 4.2, NELP 2.2)

Additionally, involving families in the communication process creates a collaborative environment that supports student success and eases their transition (Shockley, 2018). The change is essential for distinct reasons. Firstly, it addresses the unique challenges LTMLLs face, who often struggle due to extended periods in the ELD program. The plan accelerates their language progress by offering targeted interventions, enabling them to transition more smoothly into mainstream education. Furthermore, by aligning with educational standards and district goals, the plan improves the school's performance metrics and meets expectations set at both local and state levels (Clark, 2020). The optimization of resources through adjustments in teacher allocations and class sizes ensures that students receive focused instruction, benefiting both their learning experience and teacher workloads. The continuous evaluation of outcomes over two years guarantees that the plan remains effective and adaptable, allowing for improvements as necessary (Martinez, 2019). In conclusion, the proposed plan's significance lies in its potential to bridge language gaps, foster family-school collaboration, and align with educational standards while meeting district and state expectations for student achievement and program success.

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Tables

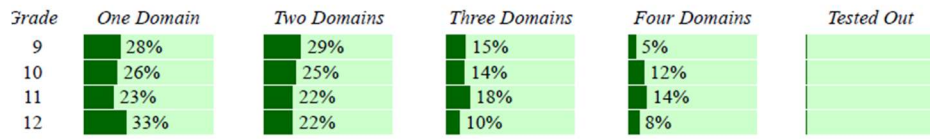
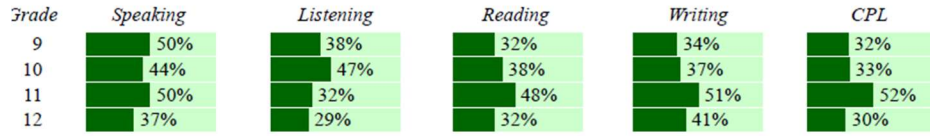
Table 1

ACCESS Test Scores for East Central High School

<p>School: EAST CENTRAL HIGH SCHOOL (710) Students: All active Score Improvement: Any increase Dates: 7/27/2023 - 6/7/2024</p>											
Grade	Cou nt	Spea king	Listeni ng	Readi ng	Writi ng	CPL	One Dom ain	Two Dom ains	Three Domai ns	Four Domai ns	Tested Out
9	183	92	69	58	62	59	51	53	28	10	-
10	178	79	83	68	65	59	46	45	25	21	-
11	173	86	55	83	88	90	40	38	32	25	-
12	153	57	44	49	63	46	51	33	16	12	-
Totals:	687	314	251	258	278	254	188	169	101	68	-

School: EAST CENTRAL HIGH SCHOOL (710) Students: All active Score Improvement: Any increase
 Dates: 7/27/2023 - 6/7/2024

Grade	Count	Speaking	Listening	Reading	Writing	CPL	One Domain	Two Domains	Three Domains	Four Domains	Tested Out
9	183	92	69	58	62	59	51	53	28	10	-
10	178	79	83	68	65	59	46	45	25	21	-
11	173	86	55	83	88	90	40	38	32	25	-
12	153	57	44	49	63	46	51	33	16	12	-
Totals:	687	314	251	258	278	254	188	169	101	68	-



(Ellevation 2024)

Figures

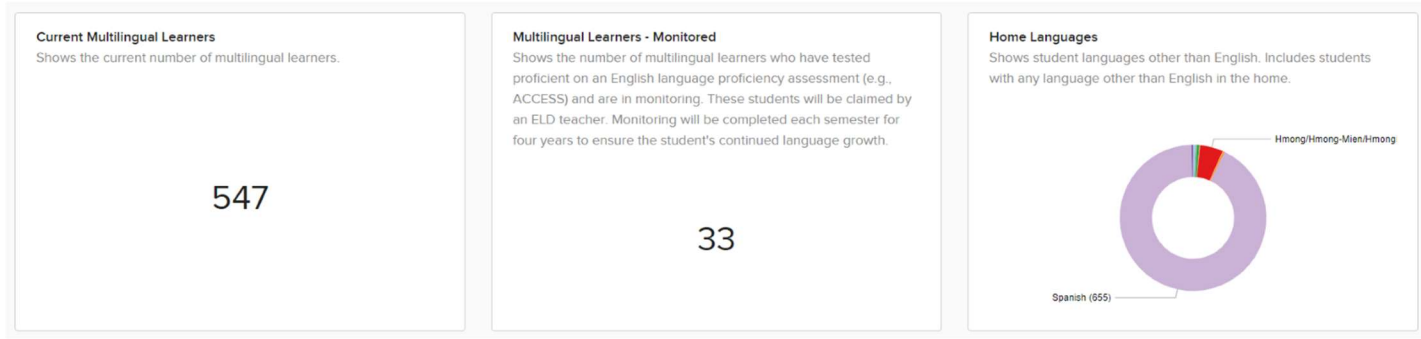


Figure 1. Current MLL Population of East Central High School

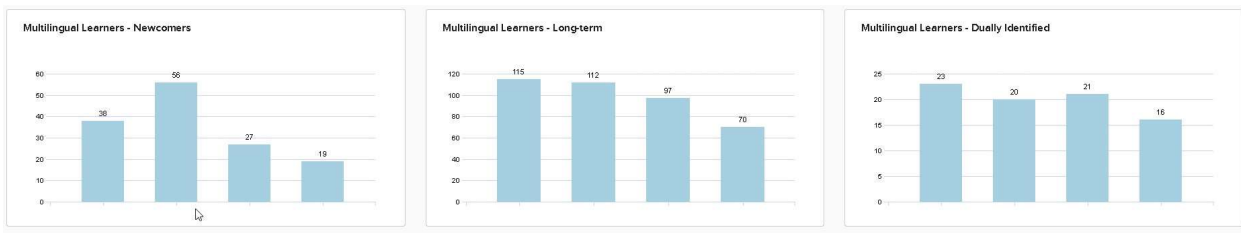


Figure 2: Breakdown of MLL Population of East Central High School

Figure 3: ML who met or did not meet growth target.

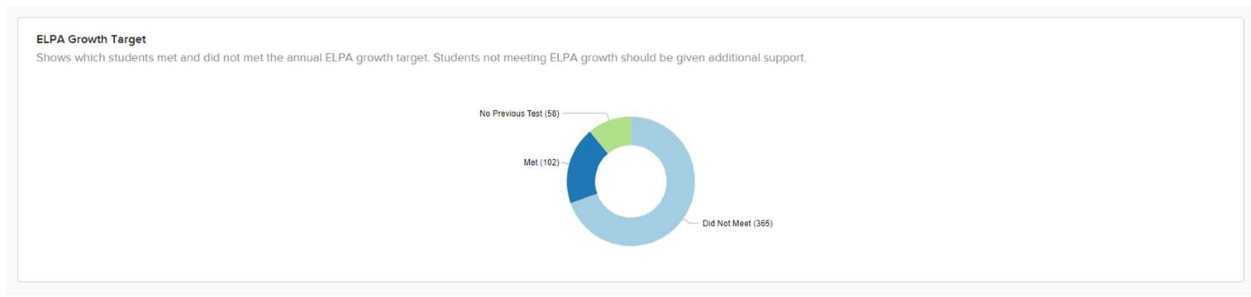


Figure 4: ELPA Progress by grade level

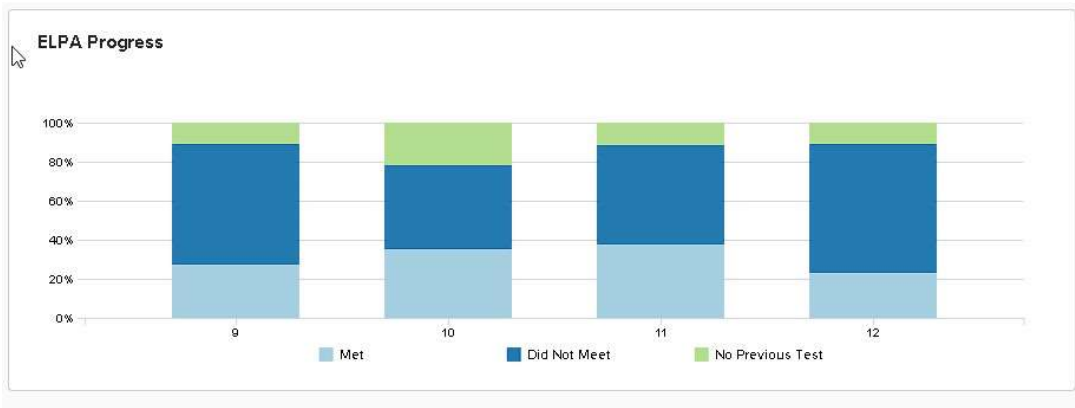


Figure 5: LTEL Country of Birth

